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RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI IMMEDIATE 0379

RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE 0166

RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE 0252

RUEHKU/AMEMBASSY KUWAIT IMMEDIATE 0349

RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH IMMEDIATE 0205

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO IMMEDIATE 1894

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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 BAGHDAD 000921

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER IR IZ KU SA SY

SUBJECT: NSA RUBAIE ON UPCOMING DIPLOMATIC OUTREACH

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RYAN C. CROCKER, REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: In a March 21 meeting with the Ambassador, Iraqi National Security Advisor Mowafiq Rubaie reviewed a series of upcoming diplomatic engagements including his trip to Saudi Arabia, possible PM attendance at the Arab League Summit, the Prime Minister's trip to Brussels, and the Expanded Neighbors Ministerial. Rubaie explained that he would try to overcome the currently sour relationship with the Saudis and that he expected to meet the Crown Prince and hopefully the King. Iraq sought to depoliticize their security relationship and needed the KSA to lead the way in order to pave the way for increased engagement with the Gulf nations. Discussion then turned to the facilities available for Saudi, Kuwaiti, and UAE embassies in Baghdad and Egypt's willingness to send an Ambassador. The Ambassador emphasized the importance of the PM's trip to Brussels and the need for Europe to expand its engagement with Iraq at this time. Rubaie introduced his concept for a regional counterterrorism pact to bring together Iraq's neighbors to fight al-Qaeda, PKK, PJAK, and other terrorist groups. This proposal included the GCC nations, a group with which Rubaie planned to expand ties through Iraqi participation in GCC committees on "soft" topics.

¶2. (S) SUMMARY CONTINUED: Rubaie revealed that the PM was not inclined to attend the April 22 Expanded Neighbors Ministerial due to misgivings regarding Kuwaiti treatment of Iraq, and that we needed to "provide incentives" to secure his attendance. On the other hand, the PM might be inclined to change his mind regarding attendance at the Arab League Summit due to recent violence which appeared to originate in Syria and the SARG's off-handed rejection of Iraqi concerns. The Ambassador stressed the necessity for the PM to be in Kuwait and avoid Damascus. He also sought reassurance that the PM remained committed to the Executive Committee (3 1) body. END SUMMARY.

NEXT STEPS TO RENEW TIES WITH KSA

¶3. (S) Rubaie began the meeting by previewing his planned March 24-26 trip to Saudi Arabia for the Ambassador, mentioning that he planned to meet the Crown Prince and

hopefully the King. His highest priority for the trip would be to clarify the "promises" which the Saudis felt PM Maliki had made to the King. Rather than promises, the PM had actually been describing his intentions, which were not meant to be taken as binding commitments. Rubaie admitted that his relationships with Saudi interlocutors, including Minister of Interior Nayif bin Abdul Aziz as well as former intelligence chief Turki bin Faisal and Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal, had worsened in the year since his last visit to the Kingdom.

Rubaie explained that he had known the current Saudi intelligence chief, Muqrin bin Abdul Aziz, his host, a long time. Rubaie also claimed that the King had been impressed with him in the early 1990s when Rubaie had made a presentation to him when he was still the Crown Prince.

¶4. (S) The Ambassador noted that the timing for Rubaie's visit was good, following in the wake of Vice President Cheney's visit to the Kingdom. The Ambassador recommended that Rubaie emphasize Iraq's enduring Arab identity, its status as a founding member of the Arab League, and its historic importance, for better or worse, in the Arab world. The Ambassador encouraged Rubaie to meet Ambassador Fraker if possible.

¶5. (S) Rubaie indicated that he had counseled the PM that Iraq needed the Saudis and that he should swallow any anger towards them for the good of the country. None of the Gulf countries, including Kuwait, would expand their ties with Iraq until the Saudis did so, opined Rubaie. The UAE intelligence chief, Sheikh Hazza bin Zayed, plainly told him that neither the Kuwaitis nor Bahrain would move until Iraq sorted out its relationship with the Saudis.

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MALIKI'S MESSAGE TO THE KINGDOM

¶6. (S) Rubaie revealed that he expected to bear a personal message from the PM to the King and that he had provided the PM proposed language. The Ambassador agreed that this was a wise idea and that a letter with the proper level of sentiment and good intentions would be ideal. Rubaie went on to outline what he would say to his Saudi interlocutors. After clarifying PM Maliki's intentions, he would remind the Saudis that, while Maliki would not be around forever, Iraq would be. Saudi Arabia could not afford to remain uninvolved in Iraq. He would also seek to depoliticize the security and intelligence relationship. Iraq and the KSA should join forces in the fight against al-Qaeda. Lastly, Rubaie would use Iran as an example to encourage Saudi engagement. The Iranians were working with the entire spectrum of Iraqis, even Sunni extremists, though with varying degrees of trust. Saudi Arabia should do the same, because if they don't, Iran will. Iran had worked hard to push the Saudis away from Iraq, and their absence was "music to Iran's ears."

¶7. (S) The Ambassador endorsed Rubaie's efforts to gain Saudi engagement with Iraq, emphasizing that now was the time to strengthen the relationship. The recent Arab Parliamentarians Union meeting in Irbil had been attended by a delegation from the KSA, and this might provide some positive momentum. When asked whether the nomination of the Iraqi Ambassador to Saudi Arabia could be broken out of the draft legislative package in which it now resided, Rubaie indicated that it would have to remain part of the package.

REAL ESTATE AVAILABLE FOR ARAB EMBASSIES

¶8. (S) The Ambassador explained that villas were available for embassies from the KSA, Kuwait, and the UAE, though they would need some work. The Saudi Ambassador-designate, Prince Mohammed bin Faisal bin Turki, had already inspected the

villa set aside for the Kingdom. The Ambassador assured Rubaie that the Saudi hesitance in coming to Baghdad was political, not technical. The Ambassador corrected Rubaie's impression that the U.S. was offering the UAE only furniture and not a villa, and emphasized that we would be in touch with Abu Dhabi regarding this matter. Exchanging ambassadors with Kuwait and Egypt would also be important, and the Kuwaitis were especially aware of the importance of improving relations, added the Ambassador. The Egyptians have indicated that they are ready, but they have not actually moved forward. Rubaie related that the Egyptian FM told him that he would not bear the responsibility for sending another ambassador after the first he had sent was assassinated. The Ambassador noted that he had received a more positive impression from the Egyptians, but the lack of action was apparent.

MALIKI'S BRUSSELS TRIP

¶9. (S) Rubaie indicated he would accompany the PM during his trip to Brussels slated for April 15, where he will visit the European Council and European Commission as well as NATO. The Ambassador suggested that Rubaie meet with Ambassador Nuland and promised to pass on further suggestions we received from our missions in Brussels. National Investment Commission Chairman-designate Ridha might be a good addition to the Iraqi delegation, advised the Ambassador. This would be an important visit for Iraq, and the time was right for expanded presence, more programs, and increased outreach by European missions in Iraq. The Ambassador suggested that the PM invite Javier Solana to visit Iraq, an event which could be a catalyst for further European engagement; there had been a dearth of high level visitors since Bildt and Kouchner came

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last year. The PM should be prepared to discuss the improved security situation, the continuing challenge of foreign terrorists, reconciliation efforts, and improvements in rule of law.

PROPOSAL FOR A REGIONAL CT PACT, GCC ENGAGEMENT

¶10. (S) Rubaie was generally pleased with the progress made in regional diplomacy through the Expanded Neighbors Process and its three working groups. Progress was slow and had not yet yielded tangible results, but the efforts to date had produced "something." To further advance regional efforts, Rubaie proposed a regional counterterrorism agreement, or as the PM worded it a "regional war on terror." Rubaie envisioned that participants would include Turkey, the GCC, Syria, Jordan, and Iran as well as Iraq. By bringing together the combined security and intelligence resources of all participants against AQ, PKK, PJAK, and other terrorists, the agreement could defuse sectarian tension in the region and inside Iraq. This was still a preliminary proposal, but Rubaie had received a favorable reaction from visiting U.S. officials. He would discuss it with the Saudis on his upcoming trip. The Ambassador pointed to the importance of finding a role for the GCC, which had been formed to face the twin threats of Saddam and Iran, but now needed to be reoriented. Enhanced GCC-Iraq relationships could be especially valuable. The Ambassador cautioned that the reaction of Egypt, if excluded, would need to be considered. Rubaie remarked that Egypt was "on the other side of the canal," but took up the point that increased engagement with the GCC was a priority. He indicated his intention to reactivate Iraq's membership in the "soft" committees of the GCC, to include those dealing with education, sport, and archaeology. Iraq had been a full member of these committees in the past.

¶11. (S) In response to questioning, Rubaie admitted that the PM was not inclined to attend the April 22 Expanded Neighbors Ministerial owing to misgivings about the Kuwaitis on several fronts, including disputes over oil and diesel shipments as well as Iraqi intelligence indicating that Shaykh Athbi bin Fahd Al-Sabah, nephew of the Amir and former head of GID, was fomenting problems in Basrah. Based on his experience as ambassador to Kuwait, the Ambassador expressed significant skepticism regarding the veracity of this "intelligence" and the capability of Athbi to engage in any serious destabilizing activity. Rubaie offered that "we would need to provide him (the PM) an incentive to come."

RELATIONS WITH SYRIA HEADING SOUTH

¶12. (S) Regarding attendance at the Arab League Summit, Rubaie indicated that the PM was "closer to our views" that the he should not attend, largely due to recent attacks which Iraqi intelligence had assessed as coming from Syria, including a car bomb and a suicide vest attack against the Rabbea border crossing. The PM had directed Rubaie to contact the SARG regarding these attacks, but State Security Chief Muhammad Nassif, who now had the Iraq file, was dismissive and responded with nothing more than pan-Arab nationalist rhetoric. Rubaie asked him to come to Iraq to discuss the matter, since despite the visit of the Iraqi President and Prime Minister to Damascus the flow of foreign terrorists into Iraq from Syria had not stopped. In sum, Rubaie felt that this may put the PM off attending the Summit, although he would not want to be perceived to be doing so at the behest of anyone else, alluding to Saudi concerns with Damascus.

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¶13. (S) The Ambassador laid out the case for the PM to stay away from Damascus. Syria had not stopped the flow of foreign terrorists, as it saw no cost to itself for tolerating it. If the PM went to Damascus at this time it would be perceived by the Syrians as a sign of weakness. He could make clear that his nonattendance was not due to inter-Arab politics, but that it had everything to do with Syria's interference in Iraq. This might have an effect on Bashar, although Nassif was perhaps beyond hope. Frankly speaking, the Syrians, including Bashar, were operating just as they had in the 70s and 80s, relying on force and intimidation. The shift of the Iraq file to Nassif was a bad sign, concluded the Ambassador. Rubaie brought this discussion to a sobering end by noting that he had told Nassif that Iraq did not wish to resort to unconventional means to stop Syria's activities.

U.S.: EXECUTIVE COUNCIL A KEY BODY

¶14. (S) The Ambassador asked if the PM had changed his views regarding the Executive Council mechanism (3 1), as the PM had not attended the last meeting, which had the SFA/SOFA on the agenda. Rubaie averred that since President Talabani had been out of town for the Nawroz holiday, the PM had decided against attending, adding that the Expanded Political Committee for National Security (PCNS) was the decision-making venue for the SFA/SOFA in any case. The Ambassador made clear his concern and that of the Secretary regarding the importance of the Executive Council. The U.S. felt that the Executive Council was a great step forward even if it could not solve all problems, and it would be very unfortunate if it was already in trouble.

CROCKER